Brian May: Perfect. So, Taren, thank you again for joining us today for this for this interview. We really appreciate it and how busy you are. So, thank you for that.

Taren Rodabaugh: Thank you for having me.

Brian May: Excellent. So, I thought we could start with just spending a little bit of time letting our readers and viewers get to know you a little bit. So, could you give me one word that describes you best?

Taren Rodabaugh: If I have one word to describe me, I would say tenacious. I am brave enough to try new challenges, but I have a lot of grit in order to get through where there's adversity and be able to pivot where I need to pivot.

Brian May: Awesome. Tenacious is good and in today's environment definitely needed. Complex stuff we're all dealing with. So, you have you have a degree in in manufacturing, engineering. You've worked at one of the leading consulting firms out there, business consulting firms. You've you were the CIO at Harley-Davidson and now you are, of course, at Bridgestone as CIO of Bridgestone Americas. Can you just put a little more color to that journey in terms of how you got to where you are today?

Taren Rodabaugh: Yeah. It is a bit of a windy road. Call it many detours along my career, which I actually encourage many others to, to follow whatever path they end up taking. I started out in manufacturing engineering because I loved math and science. I was good at it, but more importantly, I wanted to make sure that I had a good job when I graduated college.
So, I joined consulting because I felt that I would get a lot of variety across a number of different industries and decide what my quote unquote real job would be. I did that for 15 years and thought I would never leave. You become very addicted to learning a new company, understanding their culture, dissecting whatever business problem they have, and being successful at delivering a solution to them.
I am an avid motorcycle rider and when a call came to join Harley-Davidson, it's hard to pass up that kind of opportunity. And so, I joined Harley-Davidson and moved to Milwaukee.
I most recently joined Bridgestone in 2020, and what brought me to Bridgestone was their unique challenge of trying to pivot as a company from being the number one tire manufacturer in the world to being a sustainable solutions company, which is a pretty significant shift.

Brian May: So, the background you described, you know, which has the engineering plus the business consulting plus the I.T. I mean, if you think about today's problems, they're all... There's technology in the middle of everything we do. So how is that kind of journey from your degree to your experience from consulting and all that prepared you to deal with this kind of I.T. and business convergence that's out there?

Taren Rodabaugh: I think the experience and consulting really trained me for the situation that we're in today where we have a lot of different business challenges and there is a plethora of technology that can solve them. And the role of a CIO or the role of an I.T. organization is to deeply understand those business problems and bring the right technology solution to the table.

Brian May: You mentioned a little while ago Bridgestone's kind of vision or strategy around becoming a sustainable mobility company and that pivot. Can you talk a little bit about how the I.T. work that you and your team are doing are tying to that strategy or enabling that strategy?

Taren Rodabaugh: Certainly. So, you can imagine the strategy kind of into three pieces is the way that we think about it. The first piece is modernizing our core. Layered on to that is what we call tire centric solutions. And this is taking our deep knowledge about the physics and the chemistry of the tire and applying that digitally through a digital twin and through its use out in the field. So, you can understand and start to predict when a tire is wearing or when a tire needs incremental inflation, which from a sustainable perspective, ends up causing it to be less efficient or less effective from CO_2 emissions. Being able to predict that based on use becomes incredibly important, And so, tire centric solutions is all about combining our deep knowledge in order to create digital solutions that will help in this new case market. Again, I.T. is all over all over those items. The third piece is around mobility solutions, and this is where we're adding on to that tire insight and creating solutions for fleets or for customers in order to manage their vehicles more effectively. And by managing your vehicle more effectively doesn't just improve your economics. It also improves the sustainability. Because as we use the tires more effectively or they are run more efficient as a fleet with the right routes, we can then retread those tires, which again is good for our ecology and for sustainability.

Brian May: And we're talking about, and industry is talking about this concept of compressed transformation, which is,massive acceleration of value many times spanning multiple parts of the value chain, which you just described. When you got to, to, to Bridgestone and saw all this stuff that needed to be done, where did you start?

Taren Rodabaugh: Yeah, it was painfully obvious when I joined Bridgestone that we were going to be making changes, major transformational changes, new products, new business models simultaneously, and that we would never be able to meet the business need or remain competitive by trying to do it sequentially. However, I also noticed that the culture in I.T was very command and control. So, one of the first things that we needed to within I.T. is really shift the culture and shift our operating model so that the teams and the teammates can be more entrepreneurial in the work that they do. Easier said than done, but that is what probably my number one priority has been since I joined. And now we're really making momentum across all of those teams simultaneously.

Brian May: that's great. Can you talk a little bit about just what things are like at the top of the list? I mean, you talked about the people and the culture part, but just in terms of programs and transformations, what's at the top of your list right now?

Taren Rodabaugh: First thing that's on the top of my list is cybersecurity and information security. It is an area or an environment where the attackers are getting smarter, and they are coming more frequently. And our ability to do the transformation that we're doing, enabling new business models through digitization requires that we have strong fundamentals around our cybersecurity and information security.

The second element is that as we're doing these transformations, one of the traps that you can often fall into is changing the technology without ever transforming the business. And so, being able to ask the questions and really drive the team to say, how are we changing the processes? How is the organization changing? How is this going to enable our new business models versus when are we going to get rid of said legacy system? Really making sure that the programs are transformational.

And the third would be to make sure that we have the data thread embedded in what we're doing so that as we develop these new business platforms on digital platforms, we can connect the data from the manufacturing, from the digital twin and engineering up through the use case on the field and back again. And that requires a really strong data and analytics function. That's my third priority to make sure that it does create that virtuous cycle back into our core operations.

Brian May: So we're talking a lot about this concept of total enterprise reinvention, where our view is that just about every at least successful company is going to go, it is going to be going through a massive, you know, transformation and reinvention. Can you just double click into it a little bit in terms of how, you know, your organization is strengthening its digital presence, leveraging AI, data, and cloud specifically around things like supply chain and customer experience and sustainability.

Taren Rodabaugh: So, we have a project underway in supply chain that is not just guessing what the forecast should be but is actually using what we call sell out data. So, the data for retail sales that's occurring so that we can understand where that ongoing demand is going to be, we can build based on where the future demand is going to be and make sure that we're supplying it to the right place at the right time.

So, you can implement all the technology solution in the world. You can upgrade all of that technology, but if your entire enterprise, the value stream all the way from sales at the front end, your inventory, your supply chain planning, your manufacturing doesn't see the value of that data accuracy. Then your artificial intelligence or your machine learning fundamentally won't work.

The other example I would say might seem a little bit more futuristic, but if I give you a scenario where you are having an autonomous fleet vehicle pick up your grandmother or your children from the airport and bringing you to your house because you're not able to pick them up from the airport. It happens to be either a rainy or slightly sleeting day. Do you want that autonomous fleet vehicle to have tires on it with good grip? Do you want that autonomous fleet vehicle to understand that it has pressure loss and it's not going to make it to its next destination? And do you want that autonomous fleet vehicle to know that there's black ice on the road and it needs to slow down? Absolutely. Of course. That's what really matters. And being able to connect the physics of the tire, both as it's built as well as it's in use, the insights around the road and how the tire is being operated and its health in the field is what's going to enable making sure that your grandmother or your child make it to your home safely in that future state. ~~Pretty incredible.~~

Brian May: Very incredible. And that future state is not that far in the future. So, I want to come back to something you said a minute ago, and that was around the culture and trying to create entrepreneurs in your team. Can you talk a little bit more about that? You know, both in terms of how you're getting to the entrepreneur kind of mindset, but also innovation, you know, embedding innovation in the workforce. How are you approaching that? Are there new skills that you're seeing as the top priority of the experiences and skills your team needs to have?

Taren Rodabaugh: Yeah, I think as you look at the skills for any I.T. organization, there's certainly the technology skills around the platform, cloud, security. Those are table stakes. What I see is evolving and is just as important is problem solving. Being able to break down a business challenge instead of just assuming that the request that they're getting is going to solve the problem, really going a little bit further upstream, understanding what the business problem is and then doing the problem solving to understand which technology is the right way to solve it. That requires incremental business acumen, which isn't always thought of but is critically important in I.T. It also includes what some people call soft skills, but communication, negotiation, listening, instead of just doing. And those elements, when you're able to understand the business problem, you know the technology, you are great at problem solving, I believe that's what the magic ingredients are for innovation.

Brian May: Can you talk a little bit about your view on the role of the ecosystem and what those partners are doing or playing in in delivering this change that you're going after?

Taren Rodabaugh: Yeah. I was talking to one of my ecosystem advisors and he had a great analogy that I've really loved being able to use in the communications that I have around how to leverage the ecosystem. So, if you think about all the resources that you need to build and deliver and sustain all of these solutions that you need within I.T.,

Talent is too hard to come by to have them do repetitive tasks like that versus leveraging an ecosystem that can automate it. And that's at one end of the bell curve. On the other end of the bell curve are very strategic, brand-new technologies that you may not have had the opportunity to train your team on yet. And being able to leverage whether they be boutique partners, major players, software providers or major consulting firms for that top end of the bell curve to bring in the knowledge, infuse it, train your team for the ongoing use and innovation on those platforms. That's also a great place to have that ecosystem across your environment.

Brian May: So that was all awesome. I have one more question and it's coming back to, you know, a little bit about you, although all of these questions were about you sharing your point of view. But my last question is what inspires Taren the most?

Taren Rodabaugh: You know, I am most inspired and most motivated when I see a high performing team be successful. And sometimes that success is learning from a mistake but being able to bounce back from that and remain a high performing team.

The time when I've been most motivated and inspired was when I saw teammates helping other teammates and performing at their best because they felt that they owed it to their peers.

I have often used the term running in a pack, so you know that each individual has their unique skill sets. That's where the power of diversity really comes in, is understanding what those skill sets are and how they can come together and run effectively as a pack face any challenge or any opportunity.

Brian May: Well, Taren, that was my last question. This was awesome. Your insights were great. I'm sure our readers and viewers are going to find it to be really insightful and interesting to read. Thank you again for doing this.